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Statement submitted by Legião da Boa Vontade, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

We, from the Legião da Boa Vontade/Legion of Good Will (LGW), recognize that to make societies sustainable and resilient — as proposed by the 2018 session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) High-level Segment — the following topics need to be urgently prioritized: (a) education for sustainability and for global citizenship; and (b) increase participatory mechanisms in public issues, as established by the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, particularly in the target 11.3: "By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries."

It is expected that by 2050 more than two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities. On their own, the more than 90 megacities that make up the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group account for a quarter of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is imperative to ensure their commitment to the promotion of sustainable development. That is why we carry out in 7 cities in Brazil the Solidary Society Network program. It provides assistance and advocates for people's rights supporting 436 organizations and civil society actors so that they may contribute through institutional channels with public officials for improving city policies of social advancement and sustainability.

It is essential to recognize in the long term the vital connection between SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, and 15 — focus of this year's session — and SDG 4, particularly target 4.7, which states: "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development."

To this end, United Nations Member States, and local governments that are committed to sustainability should prioritize the adoption of mechanisms that allow the approach to SDG-related content to be measured and encouraged in their national educational systems. These subjects could be categorized in accordance with the 17 SDGs in order to foster compliance with the 2030 Agenda in its entirety.

All 95 LGW educational and social assistance centers across Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, the United States, and Portugal, have set out actions that contribute to the SDGs and impacted more than 600,000 people in 2017.

Through an internal information platform, we have promoted an exchange of experiences between these centers and a great effort is made to systematize best practices and improve the organization's efficiency and effectiveness. In order to improve LGW's sustainability policies in 2017 our sustainability team (ECOTEAM) engaged volunteer specialists and employees from a wide variety of backgrounds, from the operational level to the executive board, in participative management processes.

The data collected by ECOTEAM identified that in 2017, more than 60% percent of the organization's centers carried out projects that addressed SDGs 11, 12, and 15, which are being discussed at this conference. These social and educational activities for people of all ages accounted for 985 hours. The team also monitors the indicators related to SDGs 6 and 7, which deal with the consumption of natural resources, waste management, the conservation of green areas, and the human development of its employees.

We also believe that the mass media plays a key role in education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles. That is why we produce the Biosfera TV show, which gives voice to activists, researchers, and organizations working on behalf of sustainability. This theme is also addressed transversally in all the content produced by our other media platforms, reaching the widest possible audience.

The Super Good Will Communications Network in Brazil directly reaches more than 35 million individuals through radio, more than 18 million on open TV and more than 11 million households by cable. The contents are also available on several online platforms, among them the main social media and an app for smartphones and tablets.

Thus, we foster the sustainable awareness of our employees by way of the ECOTEAM, of the general population through radio, TV, and the Internet, and of those who attend our schools, homes for the elderly, and social service centers, which annually provide more than 13 million services and benefits to underprivileged communities.

In addition to investing in new technologies that reduce the environmental impacts of human activity, we need to call for change in patterns of consumption and behavior. For this reason, we point out a warning given by Marie Curie (1867–1934), quoted by our President, educator José de Paiva Netto, in the Legion of Good Will's message to the participants of the 62nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women:

"The notable Polish scientist — the first woman to be awarded a Nobel Prize and the only person to win it in different scientific fields (Nobel Prize in Physics 1903 and in Chemistry 1911) — was recognized not only for her efforts and countless sacrifices in favor of scientific progress, through the pioneering research into radioactivity that cost her own life…

"From the height of her perseverance and humanitarian spirit, this brilliant woman — from whose breakthroughs resulted significant technologies for the field of Medicine — concluded:

"'You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals. To that end each of us must work for his own improvement, and at the same time share a general responsibility for all Humanity…'

"With the educational power of women and mothers, let us use the technological resources available and those that are yet to be created by human audacity to persevere working on the path to Peace and Justice.

"In my book Reflexões da Alma [Reflections of the Soul] (2003), I stated that if we continue fighting for the Good, there will come a day when weapons will finally have their sinister voices silenced. In this millennium, which I consider to be the millennium of women — even though it may take time — human beings will understand that the essence of power does not selfishly lie in them, but in the spirit of Solidarity, which must unite all. There is still a lot to be done. Future generations expect bolder attitudes from all of us. If this is a difficult undertaking, let us begin yesterday!"

To promote the enhancement of current and future generations, however, it is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of our education, whether it is at schools or not. For this reason, we apply the Pedagogy of Affection and the Ecumenical Citizen Pedagogy, which provide an education with spiritual, ethical, and ecumenical values. They comprise a pioneering educational line created by Paiva Netto, which introduces significant curricular and methodological innovations and have been analysed in academia and congresses in Brazil and abroad.

The outcomes of this modern teaching proposal can be measured by the greater engagement of the families we assist in the development of their own communities, by the improvement of the academic performance of the students, and by the increase in the income of the families, even in situation of extreme vulnerability.

In our schools, we developed contents aligned with the mandatory curriculum for each age group, whose objective is to guarantee that all students have the necessary experience to prepare them to exercise their global citizenship. "Ecumenical Citizens are solidary and therefore not selfish. They are the ones who do not allow themselves to be seduced by fanaticism, because they understand that it makes no sense hating in the name of God, who is Love. In short, they know how to respect the sacred human creatures without prejudice and sectarianism. What is ethical cannot become intimidated," explains the creator of the aforementioned teaching proposal.

Regarding our methodology, we establish connections between the syllabus and these experiences. To do so each subject is worked on in six stages that complement each other. The student is the protagonist in them and counts on the supervision and mediation of a teacher. The stages are: "Content identification," "Individual search for knowledge," "Sharing and systematization of knowledge," "Collective production," "Results presentation," and "Individual conclusion." On our website (https://www.lgw.org/social-inclusion-through-quality-education), we publish additional information about our teaching proposal and about the Learning Method through Rational-Emotional-Intuitive Research (MAPREI).

In the collective production stage, concrete actions are being undertaken to achieve SDG 15, such as planting seedlings and seed bombing — that are being planned for six municipalities. Among these municipalities are Mogi das Cruzes, which is part of the "green belt" around the city of São Paulo, located in southeast Brazil. This "green belt" is a sensitive region dedicated to protecting springs and where family farming is responsible for supplying food to the largest Brazilian metropolis (São Paulo) and other important cities in the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Another example is the municipality of Nova Friburgo, in the mountainous region of Rio de Janeiro. The city was one of the worst affected by Brazil's worst climate disaster: in 2011, floods and landslides caused more than 900 deaths and hundreds of people went missing. The heavy rain and the irregular occupation of conservation areas were indicated as some of the causes of the tragedy.

Several cities in Brazil are to hold workshops on how to take full advantage of the food (in view of the fact that Brazil is among the top ten food-wasting countries), on how to reuse solid waste and dispose of hazardous waste properly. These actions are crucial in Brazil, which, according to the latest available survey, collected 91 percent of all urban waste, but sent almost half of it to inappropriate landfills and dumps, thus endangering the health of the population and the conservation of the environment. The data were taken from the 2016 Panorama of Solid Waste in Brazil report.

The LGW organized educational visits to parks and conservation areas in dozens of cities, such as Paranaíba, located in the Pantanal biome, and João Pessoa, where the challenge is to conserve the mangrove swamps. In Campinas, participants in the Youth: the Future in the Present! program went to a water treatment plant, where they learned about the challenges of water management in São Paulo, the most populous state in the country, with more than 45 million inhabitants. If it were a country, it would have the fifth largest population on the American continent.

In the United States, the Good Will Students for Peace program has engaged children and adolescents in public schools in extracurricular sustainability projects, which encourage the adoption of a healthy lifestyle, prevent violence, and help promote a Culture of Peace. A survey carried out with teachers and the students showed that those taking part in the program improved their school performance and had their self-esteem raised.

The commitment to education for Ecumenical Citizenship, or global citizenship, is for us, from the Legion of Good Will, the most important tool for building sustainable and resilient societies. Therefore, we emphasize that SDG 4, especially target 4.7, should play a central role in national strategies aimed at achieving SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, and 15. As educator Paiva Netto states, "To educate with Ecumenical Spirituality is to transform — and let it naturally be for the better. If the human being is transformed, the planet will be restored."